

12 January 2011

Chairman Duane Ankney
Joint Subcommittee for Natural Resources on Appropriations
and Committee members

RE: HB 48

Chairman Ankney and Committee members: I raise to speak in opposition to this bill and urge its "Do Not Pass".

My name is Pat Connell, and I represent HD 87, the Upper Bitterroot. I am a graduate Forester with a Forest Fire emphasis from the University of Montana in 1973, certified by the national Society of American Foresters, and excepting 2 years in Idaho, I have worked throughout Montana my entire career as an Industrial Forester. The fund that this bill addresses was established by the legislature to pay for wildland fire suppression efforts so as to avoid the extra costs attributed to a special session of the legislature so as to authorize an emergency appropriation.

Do we need this emergency fire suppression fund? Absolutely yes! It only requires a casual drive southward to Butte, back to Garrison Junction and over McDonald Pass to recognize that Montana has a dry standing, cured, ready to burn dead forest of proportions that exceed any of known history, with a component of dead standing, beetle killed timber that exceeded even the conditions of the "great" fire of 1910.

We will have fires in Montana of epic proportions. It is a absolute, and not speculation. The only variable is that will the conditions come together for a perfect firebust in the summer of 2011 or thereafter. The Blackwell-Coral fire out of McCall, Idaho was caused by a lightning storm that caused over 190 seperate ignitions. While over 90% were suppression by initial attack, the few remaining grew to combine and burn over 280,000 acres – roughly 435 square miles! Montana faces similar threats.

I understand that the governor's proposal is to depend on the executive's emergency fund account to finance any major fire suppression costs. That fund was established for unanticipated *emergencies* that could include flood, earthquake, and a host of other disasters. While the fires that will burn in Montana will truly be emergencies, the simple fact is that they are anticipated and predictable. To allow the transfer of monies from the emergency fire suppression account at this time is wrong-headed, and simply a means to "create" a bunch of bucks for the governor's budget to allocate elsewhere.

I urge a do not pass

Patrick O. Connell, *Certified Forester*